



**CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

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Monthly Meditations

THE BOOK OF MARK

April 2007



Easter Schedule

- Sunday April 1 8:40 & 11 A.M.
Procession of the Palms by the children
- Mon—Wed April 2, 3, 4 11:45 A.M.
Holy Week Lunches & Devotionals
- Thursday April 5 7:00 P.M.
Maundy Thursday Service
Enactment of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*
- Friday April 6 12:00 P.M.
Good Friday Service at Central
Participating Churches
Athens First Presbyterian
Central Presbyterian
Covenant Presbyterian
Friendship Presbyterian
Oconee Presbyterian
- Saturday April 7 4:00 P.M.
Easter Egg Hunt & Family Picnic
- Sunday April 8 8:40 & 11 A.M.
Easter Sunday Services
9:40 A.M. Children place flowers on the cross
11:00 a.m. Chancel Choir Cantata

It seems quite possible that the original end of Mark came after verse eight. Perhaps Mark felt like everyone knew what happened next and there was no need to spell it out. So he ended the gospel with the frightened women running from the tomb. Perhaps it seemed to be a nice dramatic affect. Those who read the gospel must have realized that it needed more. Thus we have various additions to the end of Mark. It may even be that Mark himself, realizing his mistake in not finishing the story, added the final verses, nine through twenty, at some later date.

The gospel of Mark tells us the good news of Easter – “He has been raised.” It is the witness, not only of Mark, but of the church throughout the ages. The church continues to bear witness to a living, resurrected Savior alive in their lives and in their midst. May our witness to this great event and this living Savior continue to spread the news throughout the world.

Bob Bohler

Mark 16: The Resurrection of Christ

It is curious that two people do not tell the same story in the same way. Let the husband start in on a story, and his wife immediately wants to correct him. And visa versa. Listen to two eyewitnesses to any event and you will hear it recounted from a slightly different angle. They tell the same story but in different ways. It is accurate to say that we see this phenomenon at work in the four gospels.

The story of the resurrection is a good illustration. Each gospel includes some detail the others neglect. Each adds their own nuance. Each tells the account in their own way. One could easily get caught up in trying to harmonize every detail of these accounts. Does Jesus appear to Mary Magdalene before or after she runs to tell the apostles, for example? Is the stone rolled away before the women arrive or just as they arrive? But trying to harmonize every detail in the gospels can be an exercise in frustration. If you assume that each writer told the story as they understood it, it is not surprising that the accounts would differ slightly. The events are too far removed for us to be able to reconstruct every detail at this point.

What emerges loud and clear, however, is that the four gospels are telling about the same person and the same remarkable life. And when we come to the resurrection, for example, the four accounts are reporting the same event – Jesus rose from the dead. Mark contains the key elements of this event. The women came to the tomb early to anoint the body. The stone was rolled away and the body of Jesus was not there. A messenger in white told them that Jesus had been raised and they were to tell the apostles. The women were frightened. He appeared to Mary Magdalene in person. The disciples did not believe the women. Jesus appeared to two disciples traveling out of town. Then he appeared to the apostles at dinner time. He commissioned them to take the gospel into the world. He ascended into heaven before their eyes. These main elements of the resurrection account come out clearly in all the gospels. All four gospels tell the story of Christ's rising.

One of the intriguing things about Mark's account is that there are several possible endings. We learn this from a study of the ancient manuscripts. Some early manuscripts end after verse eight. Others have one additional verse included after verse eight. Most manuscripts have verses nine through twenty. This means that this latter ending was generally preferred by those who copied the early manuscripts. In other words, it seems that the exact ending of Mark was a matter of confusion from early on.

The Gospel of Mark: An Introduction

The word *gospel* is derived from two Greek words meaning “good” and “message” or “news.” (We also get the word “evangelist” from these two words.) The first four books of the New Testament are called The Gospels, with the first three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) being known as the “synoptic” gospels. The term *synoptic* literally means “seen together” (*syn* + *optic*). Although the first three gospels differ in length, style, and audience, they share many similarities of content and purpose as they present the narrative of Jesus' life and teachings.

The authorship of the Gospel of Mark is debatable, but most scholars attribute the writing to John Mark, nephew of Barnabas, and contemporary of Paul and Peter. In fact, John Mark was called in some places an apprentice and assistant to the Apostle Peter, leading many to think that the Gospel of Mark consists of words and works of Jesus passed on by Peter himself. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels and believed by many to be the oldest. Most scholars date the writing of Mark between 64 – 70 A.D. This date is important because Peter's martyrdom occurred either 63 or 64 A.D. in Rome, leaving us with some insight into the conditions at the time of this writing.

It is thought that Mark wrote his message for Gentiles and specifically for Christians living in Rome at this tempestuous time. Thus, one will find within its pages encouragement for Christians to remain faithful disciples even in the face of persecution, such perseverance having been demonstrated by Christ Himself; to remain hopeful disciples even in the face of Jesus' death. In fact, Mark allots about 3/8 of his gospel to the Passion Week.

Mark presents Jesus, most of all, as The Servant of God, doing so more by recounting Jesus' actions than His words. The Jesus of Mark is a man of action, a man who exerts power over illness and death and the work of evil spirits. He is a Jewish Messiah rejected by His people because He came in a way that they did not expect. But this Jesus is also human, subject to temptation and fatigue and compassion and tenderness.

But most of all this Jesus was “The Son of Man (who) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, Chapter 1: John the Baptist prepares the way; the baptism and temptation of Jesus; the calling of the first disciples; Jesus drives out an evil spirit and heals many; Jesus prays.

(1:1-4) – “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way—And so John came baptizing ...and preaching a baptism of repentance.’”

Right from the beginning, it is easy to see Mark’s direct and concise style: unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not mention things like genealogy, the virgin birth, nor the nativity scene. He is going to tell the story of a carpenter turned preacher from a tiny, backwater town. The beginning, at first blush, may appear to be rather finite in its approach, but rest assured, before Mark is finished, the finite will leave an infinite mark.

As had been predicted by Isaiah, John the Baptist was to serve as the forerunner of Jesus. In ancient days, when a king traveled, he sent workers ahead to smooth the road and announce his coming. Likewise, modern day concert-goers are very accustomed to the warm-up band that performs before the main attraction. And so it was the mission of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Christ’s coming.

Two things strike me about this passage: John the Baptist was content to be the warm-up band rather than the main attraction; and the family of God is interdependent, meaning that we are not on this journey alone. The Bible tells us that we all have spiritual gifts. For some it is teaching; for some, singing; for others, working behind the scenes to make things happen; for some, praying, etc. Whatever the gift, we are expected to use it for the furtherance of God’s kingdom as did John the Baptist. The Buddha said, “There are two fatal errors that keep great projects from coming to life: Not finishing. Not starting.”

And secondly, none of us exists in isolation. Sir Isaac Newton once remarked in talking about his discoveries that he was able to do what he did because he was “standing on the shoulders of giants.” Jean Nidetch, a Long Island housewife, was 5’7” and weighed 214 lbs. Very frustrated with her weight, she took a diet that she’d gotten from a local clinic and added one feature: weekly meetings with her dieting friends. And so was born Weight Watchers.

Prayer: Heavenly Parent, Make us mindful that each one of us has a part to play in your kingdom. Give us spiritual wisdom and strength

per because this was such exciting aviation news. She was horrified when she read the headlines the next day: Popular Local Bicycle Merchants To Be Home For The Holidays. The editor had missed the message.

Indeed, there are difficulties in understanding all that happened that day and afterwards. But we cannot miss the most important message: We should never doubt God’s desire to have a relationship with us. He gave up heaven for it.

Heavenly Parent, Help us remember that above all else, you love us....above all else.

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, Chapter 15: Jesus before Pilate; Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial.

This particular chapter is replete with action: Jesus is tried; Barabbas is freed; the soldiers mock Jesus; Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His cross to Golgotha; at Jesus' death the temple curtain is torn from top to bottom; the earth grows dark; the women remain at the cross and then follow Jesus to His burial place. But the event that occurs at the ninth hour stands out so vividly. It is at this hour that Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This cry has been called the loneliest cry in the Bible. And I quite agree. (We hear that lamenting cry first in Psalms 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?") I don't think any verse in the Bible attests to Jesus' humanity more than these, for how many of us have had the same thoughts. We sometimes wonder whether Jesus **really** understands? I think we need just remember these words to answer that question. Do we as Christians sometimes feel as if God is so far away? A resounding yes! Philip Yancey tells of the time that he just could not pray for one solid year. He bought several books of prayer and each day offered one of them to God with the request that God accept one of those.

One of the things that always strikes me when I read about the crucifixion and events such as the ninth hour event, is the fact of how upside-down the message of Christianity seems to be. The fact that the Messiah died, of course, was one of the things that the Jews and Jesus' followers found so difficult to understand. It wasn't supposed to be that way. Mark Rejmer sent me a devotional that seems to speak so well to this issue. The verse from Isaiah says, "You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me'? Can the pot say of the potter, 'He knows nothing.'!" The devotional goes on to remind us that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

Certainly there are questions beyond the scope of our human understanding: How can God die? How can one understand all of these things within the context of the Trinity?

On Dec. 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright sent a telegram to their sister. It spoke joyfully of having been the first to experience humankind's sustained flight of 59 seconds. And, by the way, they added, we hope to be home for Christmas. The sister took the telegram to the local newspa-

as we strive to do that. And thank you that we have others of like mind and spirit with whom to share our journey. May we be an inspiration to each other.

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, Chapter 1: John the Baptist prepares the way; the baptism and temptation of Jesus; the calling of the first disciples; Jesus drives out an evil spirit and heals many; Jesus prays.

(1:9, 14) "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John... At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert and he was in the desert forty days being tempted by Satan."

As someone once remarked, "The problem with temptation is that it's so tempting." And, we might add, so pervasive that even the Son of God was not immune, for as the Scriptures remind us, "He was tempted as we are." The gospels indicate that the Spirit sent Him into the wilderness, which in Jesus' day was generally regarded as the home of evil powers and a stronghold of the devil. Mark's account is much more concise than that of Matthew and Luke, but the essence remains the same: by relying on spiritual strength from His Father, Jesus was able to overcome temptation.

There's an old story about a flock of wild ducks that would daily fly over a particular barnyard, landing in a pond not very far away. After quite a few flights, one of the ducks began to wonder about the life of the ducks below in the barnyard. They looked happy and well fed, so much so, in fact, he decided one day to leave the flock and join the barnyard ducks. Days turned into months, with the wild ducks flying overhead and honking to their friend below. But for the longest time, their honks went unnoticed, for their friend was being very well fed and cared for. And then one day, the deserter duck decided that he'd like to join his friends, and so as they flew over and honked, he replied and mustered all the strength he had to join them in the air. But alas! He had grown fat and could no longer fly. To make the story even worse, he was being fattened to be the Thanksgiving meal.

What a vivid picture of the way temptation works. As the poem says so well, "My soul is like a barnyard duck, Muddling in the barnyard muck, fat and lazy with useless wings; But sometimes, when the northwind sings and wild ducks fly overhead, it ponders something lost and dead, then cocks a wary, bewildered eye and makes a feeble attempt to fly. It's

quite content with the state it's in, but it's not the duck it might have been." But that doesn't have to be the end of the story for us, for we are told that we are more than conquerors through Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, Give us the strength to overcome daily temptations. Whether it's to guard our tongues, change our attitudes, display Christian behaviors, avoid harmful habits...whatever it may be...may we be always mindful that we are not in the wilderness alone. Amen.

Mozelle Goodwin

Mark, Chapter 1: John the Baptist prepares the way; the baptism and temptation of Jesus; the calling of the first disciples; Jesus drives out an evil spirit and heals many; Jesus prays.

(1: 25-27; 32) "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were amazed... "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick...."

Very often in the Scriptures we see the term "authority" used in conjunction with Jesus. Certainly, this can be a useful quality to possess. I heard about a man who went to see the doctor about a headache. He explained to the large, businesslike nurse behind the receptionist's desk, "I'd like to see the doctor about a headache." The nurse said sharply, "Go in that room over there, close the door, and take off all your clothes." "But ma'am...." he stuttered. "Do as I said; go in that room and take off all your clothes," the nurse said sharply. So, the man went in the room, closed the door, and took off all his clothes. Suddenly he realized that there was another man in the room. He also had all his clothes off. "I can't believe I'm standing here like this when all I have is a headache," the man explained. The other man replied, "You think you've got problems. I just came here to read the meter."

Jesus spoke with authority accompanied by powerful action so that even evil spirits obeyed Him. When we read accounts like these in Mark, the deep longing in our souls for the miraculous to occur in our lives often surfaces: for the amputated leg to grow anew, for the spot on the lung to disappear, for the empty bank account to replenish itself, for the broken mind to be mended, for the thorn in the flesh to disappear. Very often, none of these happen. I would admit that I have neither the intellectual

situation have fallen asleep...not once...but 3 times. But the battle that will occur between ultimate good and evil I suspect we cannot imagine. At any rate, we see a divine Jesus who is also human, one who accepts with spiritual maturity and reality complete and total submission to the will of God.

Philip Yancey in his book Reaching for the Invisible God, talks at great length about being realistic about our faith. The Gethsemane Passage reveals to us a Jesus who in His humanity prayed that He would be spared. (And who of us wouldn't have prayed that prayer?) God the Father did not answer that part of the prayer. We likewise often pray a similar prayer. And God does not answer that part of the prayer. And so, from this experience so often come bitterness and doubt and disappointment with God. But Yancey would remind us that the problem is the fact that our prayer might have been unrealistic. He reminds us that just because we are believers, "...I (still) had to learn that life is not fair and that God will not magically level the playing field for me...I am still seeking a mature faith: to trust that God's way is best regardless."

We know full well that we will have pain and disappointment and grief. God will not spare us from that. But in the midst of it all, we also know that He will provide the stamina and support and love to get us through it. And we know that ultimately God desires to hear from us, "Not my will but thine be done." Certainly such a prayer is not to be taken as our giving God permission but rather our giving ourselves permission to relinquish our will to that of God.

Heavenly Parent, Sometimes we find ourselves afraid to utter the words, "Thy will be done," because we know deep inside that your will might not be the same as ours. And yet we also know that your will is best even when we dread what it might mean. Give us the strength and the spiritual maturity to dedicate to you each day the things that matter to us. Amen.

Jeani Goodwin

His closest friends with Him. How very critical the comfort and support of friends can be in times of distress. It's interesting to me, however, that He tells them to pray, not only with Him, but for themselves that they "might not enter into temptation." He realizes that they will be able to navigate the chaotic events about to happen only if they are bathed in the power of God that comes through prayer. But the all-too-human disciples fall asleep. They literally sleep through a revolution.

Before we arrogantly wonder how the disciples could do such a thing, I suspect on a literal level, many of us would have fallen asleep as well. And on a more symbolical level, the questions become: (1) Are we as Christians not asleep when we remain spiritual infants rather than growing into spiritual maturity? The caterpillar, you remember, is supposed to become a butterfly. How more mature are we today than when we began our Christian journey? (2) Are we as Christ's Church/Kingdom on earth asleep in our discipleship? Are we still clinging to pre-revolutionary terms and answers that no longer fit the needs and questions of post-revolutionary humankind? Have our creeds replaced our faith? If we answered "Yes," then we are indeed asleep also.

Heavenly Parent, Help us to be awake to the task you have given us to do. Give us wisdom and discernment and strength to stay awake.

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, chapter 14: Jesus anointed at Bethany; The Lord's Supper; Jesus predicts Peter's denial; Gethsemane; Jesus arrested and the Sanhedrin; Peter disowns Jesus.

"Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. 'Abba, (Daddy) Father,' He said, 'Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" (14:35) The verse above gives more insight into Jesus' state: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." (14:34) And Matthew and Luke paint a picture of one "whose sweat was like drops of blood."

I'm not sure that on a human level we can ever fully understand what Jesus faced in this situation. Certainly, we understand the agony of facing not only death but such a gruesome, painful death. And we can understand the disappointment of knowing that those closest to you in this

nor spiritual prowess to answer the "why not" question satisfactorily, but I do know that spiritual maturity involves the wisdom expressed in David Wolpe's Making Loss Matter. "My deepest prayer to God used to be to spare me from the pains of life. Now I see that that is the prayer of a child. As a (grown up) I do not pray for a life without pain. Instead I pray 'Dear God, I know that there will be pain in my life, and sadness and loss. Please give me the strength to create a life, together with those whom I love, where loss will not be empty, where pain will not be purposeless. Help me find the faith to make loss matter.'"

I am convinced that the Jesus who spoke with authority 2000 years ago speaks with authority today for through reliance on Him, we indeed do find a strength we never knew we had, a peace that the world cannot give, and a hope that sustains us through it all.

Prayer: Heavenly Parent, Remind us that each time we awaken to face a new day; that each time a healthy baby is born; that each accident that could've happened, didn't; that each occasion when the surgery was successful and the wound did heal; that each time we see a rainbow after the storm....that you are still there, speaking with authority. Amen.

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, Chapter 2: Jesus heals a paralytic; the calling of Matthew; Jesus questioned about fasting; Lord of the Sabbath.

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" (23-28)

Growing up, my family would typically go to visit my Grandmother after church on Sunday afternoon. As we traveled the back roads to the very rural Landford Station, SC, we would inevitably see a gentleman happily cutting grass. On almost every occurrence my four older brothers and I would hear my Mom declare in her wonderful Savannah drawl "I can't

believe they are working in the yard on Sunday!” We always chimed in our support. It never occurred to my brothers and me (nor Mom) that to some, working in the yard was relaxing and enjoyable. Of course, a car full of boys would never associate “yard work” with “enjoyable”!

Perhaps what Jesus means when he states that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”, is that whatever we do on the Sabbath should enhance and contribute to our worship and praise of the Father, and not detract from it. The Sabbath is when we should take the opportunity to worship in the fashion that is most meaningful to us. After church we all have our favorite Sunday afternoon pastimes. Maybe it’s golf, movies, tennis, or family time. For some it might even be working in the yard or garden! Maybe what we couldn’t see as we drove quickly down the back roads is the Sunday grass-cutter’s smile and the movement of his lips as he quietly sang a hymn of praise for the beauty of the yard in which he worked. Whatever our Sundays include, let’s remember to make it acceptable to God on the day He provided for rest and worship.

Dear God, help us to remember that we can worship you at any time, in any way, on any day. May our days begin and end with your presence. Amen.

Lansing Patterson

Mark, Chapter 2: Jesus heals a paralytic; the calling of Matthew; “Follow me”; Jesus questioned about fasting; Lord of the Sabbath.

(2:13-17) “Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.” While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

While the tax collectors of Jesus’ day had power and status, Levi and his associates were probably thought of with disdain and contempt by the ordinary citizen. Because of this, the Pharisees saw an opportunity to attempt discredit and cast a negative reflection on Jesus as he met and

John Mark’s being the author of this gospel, he would have gotten this story from Peter, meaning that Peter’s passion for the truth was greater than his own human pride.)

The lesson: While passion misused may sometimes get us into trouble, God far welcomes passion over indifference.

Prayer: Heavenly Parent, How human are the vessels that you have chosen to depend upon to further your Kingdom. Make us worthy of your great trust. Amen.

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, chapter 14: Jesus anointed at Bethany; The Lord’s Supper; Jesus predicts Peter’s denial; Gethsemane; Jesus arrested; Peter disowns Jesus.

Early Christian thinkers and writers debated, discussed, and pondered deeply the nature of Jesus Christ: humanity vs. divinity was at the forefront. Events in chapters 14 and 15 leave no doubt that the divine Jesus was also human. An outstanding event in chapter 14 is called The Gethsemane Passage. Of the many lessons taught in this passage, two are especially worth noting: (1) Everybody’s humanity; (2) The essence of spiritual reality and submission.

Washington Irving wrote a delightful story about a man named Rip Van Winkle who slept for 20 years. When he went to sleep, George III was on the throne of England. When he woke up, another George was being heralded: George Washington. Rip Van Winkle had literally slept through a revolution. And so did Jesus’ disciples. As the time for Jesus’ death approaches, He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, taking His disciples with Him. A Sunday School teacher asked her class whether their family prayed in the morning. “Naw,” answered Johnny. “We pray at night ‘cause we ain’t afraid in the daylight.” Johnny had hit upon a critical element of prayer: we are told to pray without ceasing, (and Jesus did) but most of all, we must pray when we face those things too scary for us to face alone (and Jesus did.)

According to the passage, we see a Jesus facing an event that He clearly wishes He could avoid. In fact, His prayer is one of agony. (*Agony* comes from a Greek word denoting intensity, fighting a battle with sheer fear in one’s heart). First of all, He does a very human thing: He takes

Mark, Chapter 14: Jesus anointed at Bethany; The Lord's Supper; Jesus predicts Peter's denial; Gethsemane; Jesus arrested and the Sanhedrin; Peter disowns Jesus.

Several years ago Dr. Claude Thompson, distinguished member of the Chandler School of Theology faculty, received a medical report from his doctors that he had only a short time to live. From then on, he chose every word carefully, said the things that he wanted to say to the seminary community and his colleagues. When the time is short, only essentials matter. At this point in Mark's narrative, the shadow of the cross is closer than it's ever been. Jesus doesn't have much time left with His disciples nor on earth. As with Dr. Thompson, it's interesting to note what is important.

The anointing at Bethany – While Jesus is visiting in the home of Simon, a woman anoints Jesus' head with a very expensive perfume/oil, an act which some resoundly denounce. Jesus, however, accepts the gesture as it was intended: as an act of love and respect, and His words make it plain that it is a good thing to pay homage to the things that are important to us. (In fact, as the saying aptly goes, "The most important things in life are not things.") The lesson: Recognize and pay homage to what is important!

The Lord's Supper – A sacrament is something, usually an ordinary thing, that has acquired meaning far beyond itself. The Passover meal in itself was a meal of symbolism, a remembrance of the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt when the angel of death "passed over" the Israelites' households. And so this Last Supper is a meal of symbolism, for "You eat this bread (the body) and drink this wine (the blood) in remembrance of me." The lesson: The frailty of the human mind results in forgetfulness. We must continually do those things that will remind us of the price Jesus paid to restore us to God.

Peter's denial – You just have to love Peter. Of all the disciples, he is the one who voices his loyalty the loudest. "Even if all fall away, I will not." Of all the disciples, he's the one who cuts off the guard's ear. And yet, when the servant girl declares that Peter is one of Jesus' followers, he yells, "I don't know this man you're talking about." And then the rooster crowed. "And he (Peter) broke down and wept." Indeed, Peter was a strange paradoxical mixture, as was King David. But the two had a very important characteristic in common: both were passionate about God. David was called the apple of God's eye, and Peter would go on to preach at Pentecost. (And if scholars and historians are correct about

dined with Levi and his tax collector buddies. What a golden opportunity the Pharisees must have thought they had!

I can almost see their faces as they smugly asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus had created a situation that, while initially appearing suspect, provided an opportunity to further his ministry. He was setting an example of reaching out to the "sick". The Pharisees had no understanding of Jesus' desire to share the love of God with everyone, and not just a select few. Jesus wanted to share the Word with those who needed it the most.

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." is as true today as it was then. Let's all try to create opportunities to share the love of Christ and further his ministry in our daily lives. Sometimes we do this when we least plan on it. A kind word to a weary co-worker, a smile to a stranger on the elevator, or listening to the worries of a friend, can reflect our Christian love for all. We should seize these opportunities.

Prayer: As Jesus set the example of reaching out to the spiritually sick, help us to seek to share your love in our day to day activities. Help us to recognize opportunities to be a reflection of Christ and further your kingdom. Amen

Lansing Patterson

Mark, Chapter 3: Jesus rebukes the Pharisees; Jesus sees a man with a withered hand in the temple; Jesus calls us to reach to God

As the second chapter of Mark ends, the Pharisees groused about the disciples' plucking of grain tops on the sabbath. Jesus rebuked them: "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath." Thus the stage is set for Chapter 3's story of the man with the withered hand (v. 1-6).

Jesus is in a synagogue and sees a man with an atrophied hand. Jesus also sees the Pharisees watching him, to see if Jesus will break the strict laws which forbade work on the sabbath, including practice of the healing arts. Jesus knows that the legalistic Pharisees traipse after him not to hear the good news but to gather evidence against him.

Unruffled, Jesus tells the man with the withered hand to come forward. Jesus turns to the Pharisees: "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the

sabbath, to save life or to kill?” Realizing that Jesus has trapped them, there being no winning response, the Pharisees refuse to answer. Jesus looked on them with anger even as he grieved their hardness of heart. “Stretch out your hand,” Jesus says to the man. He stretched it, his hand is restored, and the Pharisees immediately go out to plot against Jesus.

As a lawyer I have observed the absurdities and triumphs of excessively rigid legalism, in which the virtues of kindness and justice yield to mindless bureaucracy and conformity. Recent examples: A vocal faction of the United States Supreme Court declared that in cases in which a defendant had been sentenced to death, the virtue of finality trumps compelling evidence of the condemned man’s actual innocence when that evidence surfaces late in the appeals process. In their view the execution of an innocent man may be permitted collateral damage in the service of a greater good – a fixed end to appeals.

In Virginia a local health department created a media flap when it ordered shut down a church’s feeding ministry to the poor because the church did not have a commercial kitchen. An embarrassed county manager created a charitable exception.

In Missouri hundreds of mobile homes designated for but never used by Katrina victims lie vacant in a field. Three hours away a tornado ravaged community needs temporary housing for scores of families. A plea for use of the trailers falls on deaf ears because under the rules one natural catastrophe cannot be substituted for another.

In the story of the withered hand Jesus exposed the danger of being too legalistic. The sabbath provided men and women a day of respite from the world’s demands and an opportunity to focus on matters of the spirit. Healing another without fee or demand exhibited a compassion and commitment to the least of the community that was indifferent to formalistic prohibitions. Indeed the spirit of sabbath lives most vividly when it moves us – like Jesus – to acts of lovingkindness.

Beyond rebuking Pharisaic rigidity, the story reminds us that Jesus calls us to stretch ourselves toward the Holy Spirit when we need the grace of God to spill onto us, whether in petitions for physical ease or emotional comfort. The reaching toward God, whether across unexplored terrain or familiar path, reveals a trust that wholeness lies with God.

Lord, I stretch my withered faith towards you. Make it whole. Make me whole. Make me wholly yours. Amen

Jo Carol Nessel-Sale

parents.” (v.12) This destruction will be so complete that it will end the world as they have known it.

According to some scholars, chapter 13 also contains words of warning about “end times” or the approaching time period before the second coming of Christ. That time is also full of tribulation. Hatred and evil are on the rise and “because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold.” (Mat. 24:12) Verses 20-25 tell us of a time so devastating that it requires the intervention of the Lord who “shortens the days for the sake of the elect” (v.20). However, as intense and disturbing as these words of warning are, the passage ends with the “Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” (vs. 26-27) Pretty powerful stuff, huh? Maybe even scary? Well, maybe not. Let’s look at this scripture from a different angle.

Chapter 13 begins as Jesus and His disciples are leaving the temple. One of the disciples begins to exalt the magnificent building. The mood and atmosphere are ripe for some truth-telling. Jesus tells His disciples about future events which will be life changing for them and Israel. And He warns them about ways they will possibly be led astray and betrayed. **But He also tells them what do to in this time of trouble;** He tells them where to go, when it might occur, and that He will ultimately return for them. Finally, Jesus tells them a parable about the fig tree (v. 28-29), using this example from nature to illustrate the necessity of being attentive to the signs. **Be attentive and be ready!**

To be quite honest, this was a rather difficult passage to interpret because some of the verses seem to relate to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and some to the end of the age as we know it. But outshining its potential difficulty is the comfort and reassurance that it offers to us as believers. The passages tell us that no matter how bad things get or ever could get, Jesus will not hesitate to answer any question openly and honestly. We are further reassured that within these answers is a pathway for our future attitude and actions. Finally when a certain tribulation is over, Jesus will be there, ready to “gather” us unto Himself. The end of the age? Yes, in a historical sense. But what about the “end” in a personal sense? Divorce, death, debilitating illness, disappointment. Well, here is the good news: Jesus answers when asked. So ask...and ask a lot! There may be a lot we don’t understand, but we can rest assured that He will be there for us.

Dear God, Help us to expect answers. Help us to look for them in prayer, Scripture, other believers, and circumstances.

Deb Williams

But, one of those “preachers” in Jesus’ day (a scribe) did not want to get caught up in the debate over who was right and who was wrong about picky issues which always seem to upset, divide, and alienate people. He put a more basic question to Jesus. A question which would get right to the heart of true religion. (I’ll bet his colleagues thought it was a “cop out.”)

“Which commandment,” he asked Jesus, “is the first (the most important) of all?”

Jesus had no trouble giving an answer. He had been taught that answer since he was a youngster. The scribes and Pharisees had been taught it too, but they had gotten side-tracked because of a much too literal interpretation of the holy writ as they knew it. Jesus answered by simply quoting from the scriptures what many of those around him seemed to have forgotten:

“The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Whenever you get caught up (or wrought up) over troublesome issues, do your best to try to understand how “the greatest commandment” should inform your understanding of that issue.

Charlie Cook

Mark, chapter 13: Signs of the End of the age; The day and hour unknown.

“But take heed, I have told you all things beforehand.” (Mark 13:23)

Most scholars agree that the first 28 verses of Mark, chapter 13, are words of warning given to the disciples about the forthcoming destruction of their beloved Jerusalem (which happened in 70AD). It is a destruction “incomparable” since the beginning of their time as the chosen people of God. They hear the dire warnings such as “Nation will rise against nation. Earthquakes and famines will occur. Love will be extremely rare for “Brother will deliver up brother...and children will rise against

Mark, Chapter 4: Mustard Seed Faith

Chapter Four of Mark is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. Shortly after becoming a Christian over thirty year ago, I had the good fortune to spend a week at Arrowhead Springs near San Bernadino, California. There, I met some amazing people working with the high school ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. The first group discussion I sat in on used the parable of the sower from Mark Four to illustrate why there are so many different reactions to the Gospel story.

Then, Mark presents Jesus’ story of the mustard seed which is one of my favorite of His parables. Just think about its implication. Very few of us have an opportunity to accomplish great feats in life. A Billy Graham or Bill Bright (founder of Campus Crusade) come along only seldom in life. But just think about Billy Graham’s mother who no doubt prayed constantly for her son and was doubtlessly a most devout mother. Each prayer was a seed, the culmination of which was the fabulous ministry of her son Billy.

And many of us may have heard of Bill Bright, who dropped out of a Presbyterian seminary prior to graduation. He stated a confectionary business in California. Following World War II, he was sent by his parents on a cruise to see Europe, just rebuilding from the ravages of war. Seeing the twisted aftermath, he had a vision that American colleges campuses could be used as a springboard to spread the Christian Gospel to a broken world. Few of us probably know that Bright’s mentor was a little Sunday School teacher named Henrietta Mears. During one of her teachings, a student threw his pack of cigarettes in a roaring fire. To everyone’s horror, the teacher reached into the fire and took out the pack “Son,” she explained, “Jesus doesn’t want your cigarettes. He wants *you*.” Her teachings were quite powerful, but her prayers were equally powerful seeds.

To me, the essence of these examples is that by our stepping out when prompted by our faith, we have no idea what Godly results can happen. As Corrie Ten Boom, who inspired so many by her courage through Nazi concentration camps answered when complimented for her great faith, “Oh, I only have a little faith -- the size of a mustard seed. But it’s a faith in a *great* God!”

By the way, this wouldn’t be complete if I didn’t tell the *whole* story about why my trip to Arrowhead Springs had such a lasting impression. You see, it was between working and starting graduate school on the GI Bill that I went on the trip.

I ordered the roundtrip ticket from Atlanta to San Bernadino on faith. The day before I had to pay for it, a check from the VA arrived that I hadn't expected for at least another month.

Dear God, I often feel insignificant. I often feel overwhelmed. Life's challenges seem enormous. Please give me a mustard seed of faith and allow me to plant it, sit back, and leave the results to you. Amen.

Carl Cartledge

Mark, Chapter 5: The healing of a demon-possessed man, a dead girl and a sick woman.

Having crossed the Sea of Galilee, Jesus steps off the boat only to find a large crowd waiting for him. In that crowd are two desperate people: Jairus, whose daughter is dying, and a woman with an issue of blood. Jesus' response to these two teach us something about interruptions, being lost in a crowd, and labels, and the power of touch.

Jairus, a synagogue ruler and a rather important person, asks Jesus to accompany him to his house because his daughter is near death. Jesus agrees. But on his way, an interruption occurs. A woman, quite unknown and quite unimportant, is following at a distance. She has an "issue of blood which she has endured for 12 years." Whatever the medical condition, which must have been intolerable itself, the social condition was even worse: she would have been ostracized, considered unclean, a social pariah. She has spent all her worldly possessions on doctors but has found no relief. "If I can just touch His garment," she says to herself, "I can be made well." **Interruption!**

John Lennon once said, "Life is what happens while we're making other plans." We often consider interruptions to be a nuisance, but it just may be that interruptions are actually the most important events of our day. Certainly that was so with Jesus. As Henri Nouwen once said, "Jesus did more with his interruptions than most of us do with our whole lifetime." Thank God that He interrupts the important things of the day, like managing the universe, to help me with my petty problems.

In the scheme of things, the woman was just a **face in the crowd**, a "nobody" if you like. That might have been the **label** attached to her anyway. But labels, remember, are man-made. There's a story told that when Queen Elizabeth was a little girl, she got lost in the Scottish Highlands. Finally, she came upon a cabin. She knocked. The lady of the

My thought processor was working overtime: If the coin is Caesar's, and should be given to Caesar, simply because it has Caesar's image upon it, then what did Jesus mean when he said "render to God the things that are God's"? What is it which has God's image stamped upon it, and should, therefore, be rendered to God. **We human beings** are made in God's image. **You and I** have the image of God stamped upon us. We, ourselves, are to be rendered to God!

It's up to each of us to determine how, and in what specific ways, we "render" (give) ourselves to the Lord. How are you going to do it **today**?

Charlie Cook

Mark, Chapter 12 (18-34): How Do I Decide What is Right and Good?

They were constantly out to "get" him!

- "Is it right to pay taxes to a civil ruler like Caesar?"
- "What about honoring that government? Isn't that idolatry?"
- "If a woman has had seven husbands, all of whom died, whose wife will she be when she dies?"

Questions and situations were posed to Jesus in the hope that he would say or do something foolish, and the crowds would leave him and turn again, with respect, to the traditional religious establishment for which Jesus seemed to have little regard – even disdain.

Jesus was pretty blunt about his feelings for those "preachers," in his day, for he said:

"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

What would Jesus say about church leaders today, who, like the scribes and Pharisees, seem to be in constant debate about who has **the right answers** regarding the multitude of issues before us in 2007? Issues such as family values – abortion – homosexuality – ownership of church property – the role of women in church leadership – immigration – or war – etc. and etc.

Mark, Chapter 12: What Do We Owe God, Anyway?

It was 1954. Fifty-three years ago. Some things you never forget.

I was sitting in the chapel at Presbyterian College. Yes, it seems like all the students went to chapel those days. Including a “beagle-like” hound which belonged to one of the professors. That dog would sing (howl) right along with the rest of us as we howled (sang) out heartily some of those “good old” gospel hymns.

Though I remember the dog, I don’t remember who was preaching that day. I don’t really remember anything the preacher said. What I do remember – and I guess I always will – is the Scripture he read before he began to preach. That Scripture set my mind and heart to thinking for all of the rest of that chapel period. Those thoughts continue to be important to me.

The Scripture was Mark 12:13-17. It described how some of the religious leaders were doing their best to discredit Jesus – to trap him into saying or doing something which would cast doubt about him in the minds of the people who were flocking to him.

They knew that Jesus cared for and respected people regardless of their importance or position in society. No great religious or political leader seemed to impress him at all.

Their “trap” was this: “Jesus, if you really hold no individual persons in high regard, why should we honor Caesar, the great political ruler, by paying taxes to him?” Perhaps they hoped that Jesus would raise questions about Caesar’s authority, and then **Caesar** would “get rid of him” and **they** would no longer have to contend with this new popular religious upstart.

Boy, were they in for a surprise. Jesus asked them to give him a coin to look at. He asked them whose image was embossed upon that coin. When they acknowledged that the coin had Caesar’s image upon it, Jesus told them “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” The image upon the coin identified the coin as Caesar’s.

Then Jesus continued by saying, “render to God the things that are God’s.” The Scripture says that they were “amazed” at him. They had set a trap, but he had escaped that trap.

I don’t know what else those religious leaders thought, but I sure did do some thinking on my own (instead of listening to what the preacher was saying that day).

house answered the knock and asked, “Well, little girl. Who are you?” Elizabeth replied, “I’m nobody, but my daddy is the King.”

“Reach out and touch someone,” was a telephone advertisement of some time ago. We know the power of a touch, for it’s the touch on the shoulder that expresses what words never can. A song “touches our heart,” we find ourselves “touched” by the kindnesses of our church family, we are “touched” by a musical presentation or a stirring poem. Bill Gaither’s gospel song says it well: “Shackled by a heavy burden, ‘neath a load of guilt and shame; then the hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same. He touched me. O, He touched me. And O, the joy that floods my soul! Something happened and now I know, He touched me and made me whole.”

Prayer: Heavenly Parent, We long for the touch of the Master’s hand each and every day. And in turn, help us to touch others. Amen

Jeani Goodwin

Mark, Chapter 6: A Prophet without honor; Jesus sends out the 12; John the Baptist beheaded; Jesus Feeds the 5,000 and walks on water.

Christian Scientists?

About a year ago, a scientific study led by an FSU Oceanography professor provided a solid, plausible explanation for Jesus’ miraculous walk across the water, as accounted in Mark, Chapter 6. The study found that Jesus could easily have tread on a patch of floating ice, called “springs ice,” indistinguishable from surrounding unfrozen water. Springs ice is a phenomenon that has likely occurred only a handful of times over several thousand years. More recently, an archeologist found a small tomb which was displayed all over the news as the possible tomb of Christ. But as hard as the media tried, the story did not crumble the foundations of Christianity.

Why do scientists want to “expose” or perhaps “disprove” the stories of the Bible? Or is that the goal? The fact is that throughout history, scientists have worked to explain many things in the world of which we do not have a thorough understanding. Such work leads to arguments and debates such as the one over the teaching of evolution vs. creationism in our public schools.

Without delving into either side of that heated topic, I have one question that keeps coming to mind: Do the theories of evolution and creation really have to negate each other? Can't science and religion coexist? There have been numerous scientific explanations for many of our treasured Biblical stories, including the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Star of Bethlehem. But these explanations, which may or may not be accurate, do not undermine the tenets of Christianity. The Christian faith is one that is strong enough to embrace, simultaneously, the truths of science and faith and to deal quite well with the questions of finite humankind.

For a person of strong faith, science and religion do not have to exist in a dichotomy. Every day, science reveals new wonders to us. Science traffics in the miracle of understanding. No doubt there will be plenty of scientific discoveries in the future that will lead the generation ahead to understand things we cannot comprehend – maybe even some of our miracles. But these discoveries will make the events no less miraculous. It is not fair to an awesome God to declare that no event with a scientific explanation can be proclaimed a miracle. When Jesus walked across the water, he performed a miracle in the eyes of his disciples. We, his disciples, continue to read about his miracles with an even greater understanding of how God made them possible.

Dear God, Thank you that the miraculous still happens. Every time a healthy baby is born, every time a potential accident does not happen, every time the surgery is successful and the body heals itself, every time the finite communicates with the Infinite, a miracle happens. Help us to remember that...which will also be a miracle.

Charlotte Poss Chromiak

Mark 7: Pandora's Box

Pandora's Box is a descriptive term that is often used to describe an unforeseen crisis that develops as a result of a seemingly harmless event. Pandora herself is a character in Greek Mythology given by Zeus to punish the world after Prometheus gave the gift of fire to humans. Pandora was given many beautiful gifts, including fine clothing from Athena, beauty from Aphrodite, musical talent from Apollo, curiosity from Hera, and cunning and boldness from Hermes. Zeus himself gave her a beautiful box which she was told never to open. Until then, as the story goes,

Mark, Chapter 11 (27-33): What is your Authority?

"And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." Mk. 1:22 (ESV)

We live in a time when authority doesn't count for much. We desire and demand complete mastery over our affairs and our fate and we bristle at the suggestion that someone else might have a superior role in that determination. We are not unique in this, but our unprecedented access to material resources and technological empowerment fuels our belief in the ability and the right to define ourselves and create our personal Garden of Eden where we rule supreme. Each one does what is right in his own eyes. (Jud. 21:25) Our eyes have been opened and we can be as gods. (Gen. 3:5)

It seems the only time that authority might matter is when someone else is encroaching on our perceived delegation. That was the rub between Jesus and the Jewish leadership.

Since the beginning of His ministry all who heard Jesus were convinced of His authority. His teaching cut to the quick and there was no denying the demonstrations of signs, wonders and miracles that attended and gave credence to that authority.

Questioning the source of His authority in this passage was not an attempt by the chief priests to gather information, rather it was an attempt to lead Jesus into self incrimination so that He could be eliminated, leaving the Jewish leadership free to carry on with the abuse of the authority granted to their positions – an abuse Jesus had repeatedly identified.

To admit that John's ministry was of God would be to acknowledge that John's testimony was true, including his proclamation that Jesus was the Lamb of God. To deny John would alienate the people whose support allowed them their position and the opportunity to conduct the affairs of Israel as they saw fit.

What is our response today? Do we acknowledge Jesus for what He is, as proclaimed by John the Baptist, the prophets, the Law and the New Testament rendering us completely subject to His authority? Or do we take the course that allows us, like the Jewish leaders, to compile our own personal Talmud with its conditions, exceptions and regulations that allow us to modify or ignore those precepts of scripture that infringe on our personal autonomy?

"For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Heb. 4:12(ESV)

Tom Virkler

Mark, Chapter 11 (15-19): Cleansing the temple

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.” Mal. 3:1-2 (ESV)

Jesus avoided using the title of Messiah in conjunction with His ministry. Israel’s vision of her coming savior had become that of a political conqueror who would free the nation from the rule of Rome. The “Messiah” had been reduced to the vehicle that would save them from all worldly annoyances. Jesus liked best to refer to Himself as the Son of Man, which hearkened back to a more spiritual and supernatural role described by the prophet Daniel.

The gospels describe the increasing animosity toward our Lord among the Jewish leaders as He criticized them and their religious institution rather than the Evil Empire that they felt was a more worthy target. The acrimony reached its peak when Jesus “desecrated” Israel’s most holy place during her most holy week.

We can only imagine the mayhem that swelled through the packed outer Court of the Gentiles. The act illustrates how Jesus goes about changing what he finds unacceptable in our lives. He disrupts those booths which contain the things of the world that have encroached inappropriately upon our walk with God, or are carried out in a manner not totally pleasing to Him. He condemns our practice of thinking that we can exchange the currency of our lives for something with a more acceptable outward appearance. He clears those areas meant for use in the spread of His word through us.

And all for the purpose of reclaiming that place where He meets and fellowships with us in a covenant relationship.

If we are candid we realize that the indignation of the temple leaders too often resembles our attitudes when Jesus disrupts the sacred precincts of our lives.

When we begrudge the circumstances and the unpleasantries we believe are unjustly imposed upon us, it is good to meditate on this account of our Lord cleansing the house that He loved so that it could be returned to its beneficial use.

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” 1 Cor. 3:16 (ESV)

Tom Virkler

mankind had few if any problems. However, curiosity got the best of Pandora and she did open the box, releasing all kinds of problems for mankind. When Pandora realized what she had done, she tried to close the lid in a hurry but she only succeeded in keeping one thing in the box. That was Hope. For awhile the world stayed pretty bleak but eventually Pandora returned to the box and let hope out too, so that humankind always has hope in times of peril.

How does this story apply to Christians in the 21st Century? We can think of Pandora’s Box as a synonym for sin and the attractiveness of sin to us in our lives on the Earth. We can see how one thing leads to another and sometimes the results are worse than we thought. From scripture we know that sin begins in the mind. Mark 7: 21-22 says “All these evil things begin inside people, in the mind: evil thoughts sexual sins, stealing, murder, adultery, greed, lying, doing sinful things, jealousy, speaking evil of others, pride, and foolish living.” King David had such a great attraction for Bathsheba that he was willing to commit murder. Oh how he must have suffered when Nathan accused him, 2 Samuel 12:7, and he admitted his wrongdoing, Psalm 51:1-5. All of this pain and suffering could have been avoided if he had dealt with the thought of Bathsheba in a prayerful way and had overcome the lustful desires that he had before acting on them.

John Hagee writes in his book, God’s Two minute Warning, “How do my daily choices affect my life? Watch your thoughts, for they become your words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Understand your actions, for they become habits. Study your habits for they will become your character. Develop your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

But what about the sinners? Is there any hope for us? Are we doomed by our past sins. No we can be forgiven. We do have hope. It’s not in a box but in Christ Jesus our Savior. We can turn to him in prayer in everything.

Lord, Please guard our minds and hearts and our bodies. Bring us closer to you and show us the way to live. We praise you and want to obey God’s Laws. Forgive us and help us to be strong when we are attracted to sin and help us to be charitable to our brothers and sisters who have sinned also. In Jesus name, Amen

Melody Cartledge

Mark, Chapter 8 (1-10): Feeding the four thousand; The healing of a blind man; Peter's confession of Christ; Jesus predicts His death.

This is a very familiar miracle; we've probably all heard or read this miracle from one of the Gospels. With very little, Jesus fed a multitude of people. Unbelievable! How can he do this??? Aside from the obvious miracle we see in this part of chapter 8, I'm struck by two things: Jesus' compassion and the challenge He issues to His disciples.

In verse 2, Jesus says: "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." Jesus NOTICED the hunger of the people with him. He was aware of the needs of those around him. Convenience stores weren't a dime a dozen – where would they eat? Who could seat them without a reservation? Which establishment could accommodate such a large party? No one.

The disciples' response is quite human: "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" I have to admit, I don't think that's a bad response: it's probably what I would have said. The disciples were practical people – you see a problem, you assess the resources and you respond accordingly. But Jesus wasn't satisfied with a "we can't do anything response". He CHALLENGED them to act.

I think Jesus' question to his disciples regarding what they had to offer was his way of encouraging the disciples to give, without reserve, from what they had. I can hear him saying: "Hey, these people are in need. Don't just sit there! Let's feed them! Quit looking at the problems and start dealing with possibilities, people!!!" He challenges them not to remain on the fringes or the sidelines – either not wanting to get involved or unable to figure out how to help. Jesus pushes them (lovingly, I'm sure) into an attitude of helpfulness.

What is the message to us in this passage? I believe that Jesus' challenge is for us just as it was for the disciples: be compassionate to those in need. When you meet them, don't ignore their need or assume you can't help. With Jesus' help, get involved and make a difference!

Prayer: Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, prayed a prayer every morning of his life that became very famous – when you're ready, you might want to start your day in the same way: **Lord, break my heart with the things that break the heart of God. Amen.**

Deb Trimpe

Mark, chapter 10: Divorce, Little children and Jesus, The rich young man, Jesus again predicts His death; The requests of James & John; Bartimaeus Receives his sight.

"Then Jesus beholding him loved him and said unto him, 'One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shall have treasure in heaven: and come, take up your cross and follow me.'" (Mark 10:21)

After being asked by the rich young ruler what to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus pointed out one thing that the rich man lacked. Now, normally, when we think of something that we are lacking, we think about a deficit. We might think that we're not smart enough, good looking enough, kind enough, etc. At first, it seems that Jesus is going to tell the man that he needs to add something to his life, to make up for the deficit, if you will. But that isn't what Jesus does. The new addition that Jesus presents to the young man is actually an abandoning of something old and a new call toward obedience. "Follow me," Jesus says.

Of course, we all know how this ultimate face to face encounter between one man and the Son of God ends. The man walks away saddened because he thinks the cost of grace that Jesus asks for is too high. When distinguishing between "cheap" and "costly grace" in *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a person their life, and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace, because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of His Son...and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life."

Prayer: Dear God, We know that salvation is free, but certainly not cheap. Thank you for loving us enough to be willing to pay the price.

Robbie Bryan